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NEWS

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For Immediate Release:
FRIDAY, JUNE 10, 1983

HOUSE MEMBERS TELL AUSTRALIAN LEADER CONCERN FOR EAST TIMOR

WASHINGTON--A bipartisan group of 72 members of the House have written to visiting Australian Prime Minister Robert J. Hawke urging him to maintain his Labor Party's commitment to self-determination in East Timor, a predominantly Roman Catholic island territory off the Australian coast which was invaded by Indonesia in 1975.

The letter, which was delivered to the Australian embassy today, adds to a growing controversy in Australia following Hawke's announcement earlier this week that he intends to review his party's position on East Timor adopted last year at the national party conference.

That comment drew widespread criticism from across the Australian political spectrum.

In the letter, the lawmakers recognized "the strong concern that exists in Australia over the Timor situation and Australia's longstanding ties with the people of the territory."

"We are also aware of the tragic deaths in 1975 of six Australian journalists in East Timor and of the horror that has struck the Australian community as details of the circumstances of these deaths have been disclosed," the letter said.

According to Rep. Tony P. Hall (D-Ohio), principal author of the letter, "We are not trying to influence internal political debate in Australia. We are only trying to make Mr. Hawke aware that many members of Congress share the concern of the Australian people over the situation in East Timor."

Hall expressed concern that international abandonment of the commitment to self-determination for East Timor would "represent a kind of common law theory of territorial integration: The passage of time makes things legal."

"There is no question that Australia will play a key role in setting the tone for world debate on the question," Hall said.

Hall is the author of a resolution introduced in the 97th Congress urging self-determination for the East Timorese and relief from widely-reported human rights

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violations in the territory.

In October of last year, Hall and Senator Paul Tsongas (D-Mass.) originated a letter to Indonesian President Suharto urging a wide range of improvements in the status of East Timor. That letter, sent just before his visit to the United States, was signed by 84 members of the House and Senate.

At least 100,000 have died in East Timor since 1975 as a result of disease, starvation, and executions.

Though conditions have improved since 1979, there have been reports of armed conflict with Indonesian troops and jailings of thousands of political prisoners.

Hawke will be arriving in Washington on Monday, June 13 as part of a 19-day world tour.

The text of the letter follows:

The Rt. Hon. Robert J. Hawke
Prime Minister of Australia
c/o Embassy of Australia
1601 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

We would like to take this opportunity to welcome you to the United States on the occasion of your first official visit as Prime Minister. We hope that your trip will serve to strengthen the traditionally strong ties between our two countries.

In recent years there has been increasing concern in the United States Congress over the tragic situation in the former Portuguese colony of East Timor. This concern has increased steadily since Indonesian forces invaded the territory in late 1975.

We wish to state at the outset that we are aware of the strong concern that exists in Australia over the Timor situation and Australia's longstanding ties with the people of the territory. We recognize that Australians have been deeply affected by the plight of East Timor since 1975 and the recurrent news of many tens of thousands of innocent deaths resulting from the Indonesian invasion. We are also aware of the tragic deaths in 1975 of six Australian journalists in East Timor and of the horror that has struck the Australian community as details of the circumstances of these deaths have been disclosed. We further note Australia's generous acceptance and assistance of thousands of Timorese refugees.

In the belief that international cooperation can have a positive effect on the Timor situation, we would like to take this opportunity to bring to your attention certain policy initiatives in the U. S. Congress which are similar to those undertaken in Australia. A resolution introduced in both Houses of Congress in the 97th Congress stressed humanitarian issues as well as the crucial question of East Timor's internationally-recognized right to self-determination. In addition, a letter sent to President Reagan by 84 Senators and Representatives on the eve of the state visit to Washington last October by Indonesian President Suharto underscored these same points.

While there are differences in detail, the U. S. Congressional resolution of last year had much in common with the platform adopted by the Australian Labor Party in that both documents affirmed the fundamental importance of self-determination for East Timor, in addition to the more immediate humanitarian concerns. The same can be said for the Congressional letter to President Reagan, which came at a time when a petition from Australian Labor Senators featuring similar points was delivered to the United Nations by Senator Gordon McIntosh. We are gratified to know that you identified yourself with the McIntosh petition.

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We wish to emphasize that we recognize the importance of strong relations with Indonesia. At the same time, however, we do not believe that the impact of Indonesia's continuing occupation of East Timor will prove to be in Jakarta's long-term international interests. In the U. S. Congress, for example, Indonesia is becoming increasingly known for its exploits in East Timor.

Conditions in East Timor have undoubtedly improved since 1979, and further improvements are to be welcomed. Nevertheless, persistent reports of the intensification of the military conflict and the jailing of thousands of Timorese political prisoners illustrate that the tragedy in the territory is far from over.

Therefore, we believe that a just settlement in accordance with East Timor's internationally-recognized right to self-determination is the only viable lasting solution. We welcome the agreement with this point as expressed in the Australian Labor Party's 1982 platform. We support and encourage the implementation of this point by your government, as well as by our own.

Sincerely,

Tony P. Hall, M.C.	Stewart B. McKinney, M.C.	Barney Frank, M.C.
Edwin B. Forsythe, M.C.	Norman Y. Mineta, M.C.	Thomas A. Daschle, M.C.
Michael D. Barnes, M.C.	Frank Horton, M.C.	Ronald V. Dellums, M.C.
Dennis M. Hertel, M.C.	Julian C. Dixon, M.C.	Bill Richardson, M.C.
Lane Evans, M.C.	Tom Harkin, M.C.	David E. Bonior, M.C.
Donald J. Pease, M.C.	Mike Lowry, M.C.	Anthony C. Beilenson, M.C.
Don Edwards, M.C.	Claude Pepper, M.C.	Norman E. D'Amours, M.C.
Sam Gejdenson, M.C.	Matthew F. McHugh, M.C.	Sander M. Levin, M.C.
Mickey Leland, M.C.	Berkley Bedell, M.C.	William J. Hughes, M.C.
Paul Simon, M.C.	Marcy Kaptur, M.C.	Bruce A. Morrison, M.C.
Joe Moakley, M.C.	Robert A. Roe, M.C.	Robert J. Mrazek, M.C.
Vic Fazio, M.C.	James H. Scheuer, M.C.	Harry M. Reid, M.C.
Henry A. Waxman, M.C.	Jerry M. Patterson, M.C.	Howard Wolpe, M.C.
Robert Garcia, M.C.	Doug Walgren, M.C.	Bob Edgar, M.C.
William Clay, M.C.	Don Bonker, M.C.	James L. Oberstar, M.C.
Edward J. Markey, M.C.	Parren J. Mitchell, M.C.	Steny Hoyer, M.C.
John Conyers, Jr. M.C.	Gary L. Ackerman, M.C.	Major R. Owens, M.C.
Peter W. Rodino, Jr., M.C.	James Weaver, M.C.	Claudine Schneider, M.C.
Dale E. Kildee, M.C.	Louis Stokes, M.C.	Peter H. Kostmayer, M.C.
Walter E. Fauntroy, M.C.	George E. Brown, Jr., M.C.	John Edward Porter, M.C.
Mervyn M. Dymally, M.C.	Al Swift, M.C.	Edward F. Feighan, M.C.
George Miller, M.C.	Robert T. Matsui, M.C.	Ted Weiss, M.C.
Gus Savage, M.C.	Morris K. Udall, M.C.	Howard L. Berman, M.C.

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